



REVISITING THE PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Various researchers employing either qualitative or quantitative researches should better understand the different competing research paradigms and its philosophical underpinnings in relation to ontology, epistemology, methodology and even the methods in collecting and analyzing data to produce an excellent research. Moreover, this paper uncovers the distinctive philosophical keystones of each competing paradigms of qualitative research: scientific, interpretive, and critical theory. In qualitative research, realities are multiple in nature and subjective; dissimilar to quantitative research there is only one objective reality. The qualitative researcher should be able to breach the objective separateness or distance between him and the participants to enter their subjective world for only then the researcher can fully well understand the experience of the phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants (emic perspective) and not according to his viewpoint (etic perspective). Thus, this article would help researchers to fully understand the nature, components, and uniqueness of each competing paradigms of qualitative research.

KEYWORDS: Critical Research Paradigm, Interpretive Paradigm, Paradigm, Qualitative Research, Scientific Paradigm.

Introduction

This paper reviews two (2) articles pertaining to qualitative research: *Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research* written by Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln (1994) and *Exploring the Philosophical Underpinnings of Research: Relating Ontology and Epistemology to the Methodology and Methods of the Scientific, Interpretive, and Critical Research Paradigms* by James Scotland (2012).

The following are the objectives of this paper:

1. Delineate essential terms related to the articles that may shed light and give awareness to the readers (*remember*).
2. Summarize the articles the way it would be certainly understood (*understand*).
3. Outline the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of alternative inquiry paradigms (*apply*).
4. Compare and contrast the paradigms of in qualitative research: scientific paradigm, interpretive paradigm, and critical research paradigm (*analyze*).
5. Convene reaction in terms of new learning, application, and challenges (*evaluate*).
6. Formulate a conclusion in regards to competing paradigms in qualitative research and its philosophical underpinnings (*create*).

Moreover, this paper uncovers the distinctive philosophical keystones of each competing paradigms of qualitative research: scientific, interpretive, and critical theory. Consequently, this article would help researchers to fully understand the nature, components, and uniqueness of each competing paradigms of qualitative research.

Introduction: Understanding Paradigm

Various researchers employing either qualitative or quantitative researches should better understand the different competing research paradigms and its philosophical underpinnings in relation to ontology, epistemology, methodology and even the methods in collecting and analyzing data to produce an excellent research. Researchers may select their paradigm of choice whether a critical theory, interpretive, positivism, or several ideological position (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research is a research strategy that accentuates the utilization of descriptions than number in the quantitative research.

To further understand the variations of the competing paradigms of qualitative research, defining paradigm will be helpful in understanding this investigation. Bryman (2012) defined paradigm as a '*deriving from the history of science, where it was used to describe a cluster of beliefs and dictates that for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted*'. Furthermore, paradigms are set of concepts, thoughts, and postulates of a researcher that dictates what he wants to study. It serves as a guiding principle to reach his inquiry objective. Similarly, Guba and Lincoln defined it as '*the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but also in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways*' (1994, p. 105). However, since a paradigm is a set of beliefs, there is no chance to validate its truthfulness. In fact, there was a

paradigm debate period during the 1970s and 1980s that the style of inquiry of qualitative research was based on different foundational assumptions of quantitative research and progressively confronted by incongruities, which are unreliable to formulate a judgment at that instance. They believe that due to insistence quantitative and qualitative research weren't effective to be integrated. The progression of the incongruities paves a revolution of the discipline, nonetheless, it can be resolve when a new paradigm comes in which marks that a new era of the discipline sets in (Bryman, 2012, p. 630).

Critiques of Intra-paradigm and Extra-paradigm: Received Views

The first article, competing paradigms of qualitative research, started with critique of the received views and the emergence of over-quantification. Criticisms of both intra-paradigm (internal to the conventional paradigm) and extra-paradigm (suppositions of the alternative paradigm) were stated and explained. Intra-paradigm critiques varied to question the validity of the generally accepted theory or belief (conventional wisdom), which are: (a) context stripping, which limits the results particularly its applicability and generalizability to the same cases, (b) exclusion of meaning and purposes (e.g. human behavior), (c) disjunction of grand theories with local context, which lacks consistency and correspondence (etic and emic theories), (d) general data cannot be applied to a singular case, and (e) dimensional discovery in the inquiry is eliminated. However, these critiques can be eliminated or at least re-structured through the use of qualitative data (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 107).

On the other hand, external (extra-paradigm) focuses in the assumptions defining alternative paradigms had weightier critiques from scholars especially when it comes to the following challenges: (a) theory-ladenness of facts (affected by theoretical propositions; facts would be dependent to the theory without framework facts will be invalid and questionable), (b) under determination of theory (the availability of evidence or facts is insufficient to identify which belief should hold about the evidence which theories are underdetermined by observations; truth can be questioned with one falsification of facts, thus, it cannot be verified), (c) value-ladenness of facts (knowledge, perspectives, and situational biases and value orientation of the investigator or an analyst that fill the epistemic gap which makes any assessment to a certain degree), and (d) dyad interaction between of the inquirer-inquired (subjective and descriptive interaction is more plausible than objective observation especially in social sciences). Both critiques have been subjected for a lot of discussion and debates to resolve these challenges. Both are essential to the discipline and captured the interest of researchers. This was the reason why alternative paradigms were created.

Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology: Components of Paradigm

A paradigm has three (3) essential questions/assumptions as mentioned in the article written by Guba and Lincoln (1994) namely: ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions. Ontological questions deal with the questions regarding '*what entities exist*' or '*what is the form and nature of reality and what is there that can be known about it*' (Guba, 1994, p. 108). Particularly Bryman (2012) mentioned that the concern of the questions of social inquiry falls with the nature of social units – objectivism and constructionism.

The type of an inquiry that deemed as '*acceptable knowledge*' is called epistemology (Bryman, 2012). These assumptions are focused on how knowledge can be communicated and known which can be learned with the same philosophies of natural sciences. Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated that the line of epistemological

questioning focuses on 'what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be done?' (p.108). Thus, it concentrates with the question 'what it means to know?' Conclusively every paradigm encompasses several assumptions about methods; nevertheless nothing is circumscribed to merely one way of collecting and analyzing data.

The methodology pertains to the systematic organization of how data will be collected and treated for data analysis. In the article written by James Scotland, 'methodology is the strategy or plan of action which lies behind the choice and use of particular methods' (Crotty, 1998, p.3). It is indeed that methodology is the backbone of how data will be gathered, what statistical treatment will be used, and why the data will be analyzed by this method. These three (3) essential components have their own distinct characteristics, which build up a paradigm, therefore, researchers must be able to know the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the research and how these assumptions can be related with the processes (methods) that will be used in the investigation plus the relationship of

the assumptions to the findings that will be discussed at the end of the research.

Competing Paradigms and its Philosophical Underpinnings

As discussed above the meanings of paradigm, there are three (3) known competing paradigms of qualitative research although one of them may be applicable also for quantitative research. Scientific paradigm includes positivism and post-positivism, interpretive paradigm for social constructivism/constructionism, and critical theory paradigm that involves postmodernism. The different basic beliefs (metaphysics) of received and alternative inquiry paradigms were scrutinized according to ontology, epistemology, and methodology to show their similarities and differences when it comes to its respective perspectives/disciplines. To further understand the various kinds of research paradigms, a table of comparison from Creswell (2009) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) was created in relation with the philosophical underpinnings of each paradigm as well as citing examples, principles and theories, outcomes, and pitfalls of each alternative paradigm. The scientific paradigm or the doctrine of positivism is a natural science epistemol-

Table 1.1 Competing Paradigm with their Philosophical Underpinnings in relation with ontology, epistemology, and methodology.

Competing Paradigms of Qualitative Research				
Component	Scientific	Interpretive	Critical	
	Positivism	Post-Positivism	Constructivism	Critical Theory
Ontology	Realism	Critical Realism	Relativist	Historical Realism
Epistemology	Objectivist	Modified Objectivist/dualist	Subjectivist and Transactional (Constructing knowledge linked from the investigator and participants)	Subjectivist and Transactional (Mediated reflectively through the perspective of the investigator)
Methodology	Experimental and Quantitative	Critical Multiplism/Modified Experimental and Manipulative that seeks reduction with qualitative methods.	Hermeneutical and Dialectical	Dialogic and Dialectical
Methods	Quantification and Controlled Experiments	Both Quantitative and Qualitative Methods	Qualitative through use of dialogues	Focused on investigator/participant dialogue, uncovering subjugated knowledge and linking it to social critique
Example	Quasi Experimentation	Experimentation, Correlational, and Non-Experimental Studies	Case Studies, Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and Ethnography	Critical Disclosure Analysis, Critical Ethnography, Ideology Critique, and Action Research
Principle/Theory	Phenomenalism, Deductivism, and Inductivism	Social Constructivism, Pragmatism, and Participatory Action	Postmodernism like Critical Care Theory, Feminism, Queer Theory, and Disability Theories	
Outcome	Generalization	Correlation	Understanding	Emancipation
Pitfalls	Value-laden Judgments and knowledge production is political	Questions the Validity, Legitimacy, and Trustworthiness of the data	Anti-foundational and attacking reality	

ogy that is really hard to discuss and outline in an ordered manner because researcher have various numbers of ways on how they explained it in the books. Bryman (2012) stated that the positivism delves on the process of natural sciences methods beings applied on the reality and beyond. It involves the principles of phenomenalism, deductivism, and inductivism in its scientific inquiry of reality (Hacking, 1984). Realism is the ontological assumption of positivism where natural and social sciences beliefs must have distinct process in gathering data, thus, generalizing that reality may have variation from its description. The epistemological standpoint of positivism is objectivism where the social phenomena and their descriptions have a subsistence that is solely self-regulating of the social actors. Methodology of positivism includes quantification, manipulation, correlation, and experimentation that concentrating in explaining relationships, thus, it seeks to validate and verify the proposed questions and hypotheses by subjecting to empirical test (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 110) and identifies causes that certainly influence outcomes (Creswell, 2009, p. 7).

Correspondingly, post-positivism's critical realism is another example of philosophical standing that implies a justification of the nature of scientific practice. The critical realism's philosophy focuses on a critical investigation and analysis in capturing the closest possible meaning of the reality (Cook and Campbell, 1979). Similarly to the earlier paradigm, post-positivism had dualist and objectivist epistemology; however, it was modified with much bearing on the external guardian of objectivity, critical traditions and critical community (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Critical multiplism is the method for this paradigm, which aims to falsify hypotheses rather than verify by increasing qualitative methods to eliminate intra-paradigm critiques.

Interpretivism is contrary to the perspective of the belief system of positivism. This alternative paradigm considers the viewpoints and perspectives of the researcher in the quest of scientific inquiry. Individuals and institutions are fundamentally dissimilar from the natural sciences; hence, subjectivism or subject-

tivity plays substantial part in this paradigm. Interpretive research predominantly points to understand the social action to figure out the cause and effect of the social phenomena/reality (Weber, 1947, p. 88). Interpretivism's ontological standpoint is relativism, which depicted that every individual has subjective construction of reality mediated by human senses (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 110), which definitely needs to be addressed by the primary investigator to get the meaning of the diverse realities of individuals.

Social constructivism or constructionism shares philosophical foundation with interpretivism. The ontological position of social constructivism emphasizes on social interaction and continuous revision where the social actors and phenomena are unceasingly accomplishing its meaning (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, constructing knowledge linked from the investigator and participants through utilization of language and aspects of the independent world build up the social reality. As mentioned earlier, subjectivism plays an important role in the interpretivism's epistemological position that is grounded on real world phenomena. The researcher transacts with the subject of the inquiry to create findings as the proceedings becomes longer and deeper. Methods that interpretivists should employ focuses on hermeneutics and dialectical dialogues to create refinement of individual constructions that is explicated and analyzed through hermeneutic techniques determined in the methodology of the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). The primary objective is to create unanimity/commonality constructions of scholarly and sophisticated emergent themes that would mirror the lived experiences of the participants. Dialectic validation of results from the participants would determine the output's trustworthiness, legitimacy, and validity. Dissimilar to scientific research, interpretive paradigm often compromises the autonomy and privacy of the participants in conducting the methods of getting information such as intimacy and open-endedness might back-off the participant from opening up his or her experience because the investigator might reveal confidential information, fallacious statements, and truths (Howe & Moses, 1999, p. 40). This is the reason why ethical considerations are very important when con-

ducting this qualitative research – autonomy and confidentiality should always be considered and be given top priority. Participants may withdraw from the inquiry anytime especially if the situation becomes uncomfortable and precarious.

Interpretive paradigm's methodology leads to discovering and understanding social phenomena from a co-researcher's standpoints including social interactions, cultural, and historical contexts in the social world/reality (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Amongst the methods widely used are role-playing, focus group discussion, interviews (semi-structured, questionnaires (open-ended), and direct observations. Some notable works of interpretivism were Weber's concept of 'Verstehen', German word for 'understanding'; symbolic interactionism; and hermeneutic phenomenology (Bryman, 2012, p. 29).

The last competing alternative paradigm of qualitative research is the Critical Theory. This paradigm seeks to emancipate the political ideologies with the aim to change the policies and procedures already existed. The ontological standpoint of critical theory is historical realism. It necessitates critical knowledge of the person who has dissimilar interpretation of reality, historical events. Reality presumed as plastic and then crystallized due to time and molded from political, social, ethnic, economic, and gender-values (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Comparable with interpretivism, language and diverse independent worldaspects form reality, however, for critical paradigm, language has the capacity to empower and weaken the social world, reality (Scotland, 2012). So, reality can be understood, but only as constructed historically and connected to power. Just like constructivism, critical theory's epistemology is subjectivist and transactional. The researcher and the participants interact forming value-mediated outcomes that are inclined within the society (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). Likewise, knowledge is mediated reflectively through the standpoint of the investigator. Methodology of critical theory focuses on the cross-examination of assumptions and values through transactional dialogue amongst the investigator and participants of the research. It unassumingly uncovering subjugated knowledge and linking it to social critique. Dialogue must be dialectic in nature (logical discussions) to bring out ideas and opinions of the participants. Examples of critical theory paradigms include: critical ethnography, critical disclosure analysis, action research, and ideology critique.

Paradigms somehow overlapped in some perspectives and there are various approaches to unattached from each other. Researcher may modify and refashion their paradigms conforming to their focuses and methodology. Finally, worldviews are not communally restricted; it is up to the researcher's desire to reflect on what specific research to commence.

Conclusion:

Paradigms are set of beliefs and principles that are distinctive in relation to its ontology, epistemology, and methodology, which caused a paradigm debate during the 1970s and 1980s (Bryman, 2008). This paradigm debate resulted the idea that quantitative and qualitative researches were not capable of integration. Each paradigm has confronted with incongruities with its assumptions and findings. It was only resolved when a new paradigm materializes and satisfies these inconsistencies. From the competing paradigms of qualitative research, each paradigm has its own principles, philosophical underpinnings based from its ontology, epistemology, and methodology, and ways to arrived to their respective research objective. Scientific paradigm, positivism and post-positivism, was designed to generalize and explain relationships (experimental, non-experimental, and correlational studies); interpretive paradigm, social constructivism, aimed to understand the different social phenomenon in the lens of the social actors (phenomenology, case study, hermeneutics, and ethnography); and critical theoretical paradigms intended to emancipate and challenge conventional social structures (critical disclosure analysis, ideology critique, and action research). Figuring-out the diverse perspectives of these competing paradigms made easier for researchers to understand and apply into practice the philosophical underpinnings of the qualitative research design and methods they want to do.

Lastly, in qualitative research, realities are multiple in nature and subjective; dissimilar to quantitative research there is only one objective reality. The individual being investigated mentally constructs reality. So, the researcher must use or utilize extensive quotes from the participants' narratives in order to evidence this assumption. Epistemological assumption emphasizes on the nature and form of acceptable knowledge in a discipline (Cohen et. al, 2007, p. 7) and the relationship amongst the investigator and the contributors of the research. The proponent of the should be able to breach the objective separateness or distance between him and the participants to enter their subjective world for only then the researcher can fully well understand the experience of the phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants (emic perspective) and not according to his viewpoint (etic perspective). To achieve this, he has to do prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Methodological question pertains to the inquirer's capability to gather, collect, and analyze data. The answer for this question technically will go back to the first two questions conforming on the methodology that is appropriate for the scientific inquiry of the study. Methods that will be used should conform to the prearranged methodology.

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